



CONSECRATION:
**RETURNING
TO OUR TRUE
IDENTITY**

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A holy God calls for his people to live consecrated and holy lives. 1 Peter 1:16 says, ***“Since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*** Yet, what should be blazingly clear to us from Scripture is met with strong resistance from within the church and from the broader culture.

In response to God’s people straying from his commands and the many moments of idolatry in Israel’s history, the Scriptures provide us with many moments when God calls his people to consecrate themselves. Joel 2 contains one of the more vibrant moments when God calls his people to return to him. Prior to verse 12, the Prophet Joel speaks of the judgment that Israel is facing and will continue to face because of their disobedience. In verse 12, we find the loving words ***“yet even now”, declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning; 13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and relents over disaster.”*** God wants his people to return to him, which instructs us that disobedience and idolatry cause us to drift from the center of God’s will. How does God want his people to return to him? With their whole heart, not just outward motions. The prophet says their return to God should be accompanied by fasting, weeping, mourning, and a rending of their hearts.

As we read further, we discover that God was not calling for a private, individualized moment of consecration, rather he was speaking to the entire nation of Israel to consecrate themselves through a time of corporate fasting. We don’t find a suggestive tone, rather we find a confrontational tone. There isn’t any room for people to opt out of this moment or to interpret God’s instructions as one of many options

they should consider. In addition to calling the elders of the people to a corporate fast, Joel also calls the children and even nursing infants. But it doesn’t stop there...he also calls bridegrooms to leave their brides in their chamber, which implies that even a couple’s wedding night wasn’t sufficient reason to opt out of this call to consecration. Disobedience and the need to consecrate themselves was not a matter of private interpretation or individual preferences, it was a declared state of reality from God to his people.

But you may be wondering, “What’s the big deal?...“So they sinned, couldn’t they just ask for forgiveness and call it a day?”... “Why is a time of consecration even needed?”. A quick look at Joel 1 tells us that the conditions of life for Israel had grown quite dire. Their economy, their vocations, and their spiritual lives were all in disrepair. In other words, God wasn’t calling them to consecrate themselves because of one-off moments of disobedience, rather he was addressing what seems to have become an entrenched lifestyle that was infecting everything. Like a rapidly spreading virus that slowly shuts down your body, Israel’s disobedience slowly and tragically altered their entire way of life. A quick moment of confession or reading some portions of Scripture and promising that they wouldn’t do it again wouldn’t suffice. Over-the-counter medicine wasn’t going to cure this disease. Only a thorough surgery would do!

Which brings us to why you are holding this small book in your hands and why we are calling our church to a time of CONSECRATION.

Sadly the idea of consecration connotes a lifeless, drudgery-filled experience that feels so forced and even unnecessary.

Dallas Willard once wrote, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.” This statement seamlessly embraces the dynamics of Biblical grace. Scripturally speaking, God’s grace holds in tension a bestowing of unearned love upon us while also empowering us to obey his commands. Because we have misapplied the grace of God in our lives, we have focused on receiving God’s unearned love, while resisting his divine empowerment for obedience. The result is that any call for consecration and obedience is seen as unnecessary and superfluous.

To our surrounding culture anything that checks our desires or confronts our verve to be our own god offends us and feels dated. It’s been said that our culture has twisted the Biblical truth from 1 John 4:8 where it says “God is love” and has said, “Love is God”. We have elevated our desires and appetites to the level of becoming our functional god. In this cultural context, living a consecrated life ends up feeling like a needless, antiquated call to swim upstream when it’s much easier to just go with the flow.

With Christians and non-Christians alike struggling to see the need for consecration or even understand what it is, we desperately need some biblical clarity. For starters, here is what consecration is NOT: Consecration is not something we do to make ourselves more pleasing to God nor is it a tool we employ in the service of “sin management”. Ephesians 2:8-9 says **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** We learn from this verse and many others like it that salvation doesn’t depend on anything we can do, but it rests only on the unearned, undeserved grace of God. Galatians 5:16 says **“But I say,**

walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” The only hope the Christian has to walk in obedience rests on the Holy Spirit living inside of us, empowering us to live as Christ. Fasting and praying as an act of consecration will not make the Father love us anymore, nor is it to serve as a silver bullet against our struggle with sin.

If consecration is NOT these things, then what is consecration? In other words, what are we prayerfully hoping will be the result of consecrating ourselves to God?

Through consecration, as expressed through an act of fasting and prayer, we are not trying to become holy, rather we are recognizing that we have already been declared holy by God. A cursory reading of the Apostle Paul’s letters to the churches in the New Testament you will find his repeated use of the term “saints” as the way he addresses Christians in these various cities. To be called a saint is something that has lost its original meaning as religious tradition has hijacked this term to be designated for a select few. Only the holiest of us all should be considered saints according to this train of thought. Sadly, this grossly misses the mark of Paul’s intent when he addressed Christians in this way. To be a saint according to the New Testament is to simply mean that you are someone whom God has “set apart” for himself. When Paul called Christians “saints” he was identifying them by their truest identity as people that have been declared holy by God’s own choosing. He was calling people saints that struggled with temptation, that were broken in all the same ways that we are broken, yet despite those realities, the truest way he knew to address them was to call them by the name that described how God saw them.

When we consecrate ourselves, we are not only returning to God in repentance and prayer, but we are also returning to God's truest identity for us. The identity that we forget and stray from in our sin and disobedience is the identity we recover during times of consecration. Because God has declared that we are holy by means of his redemptive work, through consecration we can embrace our identity in Christ as set-apart ones, but if God didn't declare us as his own possession, no amount of fasting and prayer would do us any good.

A 10-DAY JOURNEY OF CONSECRATION

Beginning on Thursday March 21st, and ending on Saturday, March 30th our church will be calling a corporate time of fasting and prayer. Similar to the way that the Prophet Joel called all of Israel to fast and pray, we are calling everyone to prayerfully seek the Lord as you discern how he is leading you to practice fasting and prayer during this 10 day period.

Once you discern the type of fast the Lord is calling you to, I would encourage you to make yourself accountable to someone. Ask them to pray with and for you during this time.

Each day of your fast, use this resource during your times of prayer. Let this resource serve you as you seek God. Let this become more than a checklist kind of thing. Allow the passages of Scripture and the reflections to help center your heart in the presence of God.

In these pages you will journey through the application of the Spiritual Discipline of Silence and prayers derived from the Lord's Prayer for each day of this fast. With Scripture as our foundation, my prayer is that this resource will help you grow in your intimacy with Jesus. I'm confident that Jesus is going to meet you as you take time to pray the Scriptural truths and principles that Jesus offers to us.

In addition, each day you will be given space to write down your prayers and the ways your heart is responding to the

Holy Spirit's work. The purpose of this invitation to write is meant to help attune your heart to paying attention to the presence of God and the ways he meets us when we seek him. If you are like me, then you are often too busy for your own good. In the numbing pace of frenetic activity that our city hits us with, it's easy to grow increasingly distracted and numb to God's work in our lives. Slowing down to journal is one way to resist the toxic pull of a hurried state of living. Please take the time to jot down how God is meeting you during your times of prayer so that your heart can treasure and ponder what God is doing for years to come.

One final word: focus your heart on the beauty of Christ as you return to him in repentance and worship, not on how well you are fasting. Fix your gaze on your true identity as someone who has been set apart by God, not on your act of consecration. Why? Because fasting is hard! No matter how experienced we can become in this discipline, none of us ever reach a level of mastery. We all struggle and fumble our way through it. At times we can sense God meeting us powerfully and our hope that God is transforming us grows stronger, while at other moments we can easily feel like nothing of value is happening and that we are wasting our time. The good news is that whether our fasting goes great or it goes poorly, we are not defined by either. What defines us most is how God sees us and calls us. During this season of consecration allow your focus to be on Christ, not on yourself.

DAY ONE: BEFRIENDING SILENCE

*Psalm 62:1 "For God alone **my soul waits in silence**; from him comes my salvation.² He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken."*

*Psalm 46:10 "**Be still**, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"*

"How are you bro? How are things?" is what I asked a dear brother in Christ. It was the first time I had seen him after some significant time had passed. Through social media and other updates I would receive, his life appeared quite full. His family seemed to be flourishing, ministry looked fruitful and it looked like he was having the time of his life!

That's why his response caught me off guard...

"I'm good as far as I can tell if that is what you are asking...but if you are asking if I could handle being silent and still for more than an hour without having a nervous breakdown, then you are asking a different question!"

He laughed awkwardly. I kind of froze. I asked again "So are you good bro?"

Befriending silence is not just a struggle for busy, Type A personalities. I find it's a struggle for everyone, even if that struggle looks different from person to person.

We live in a world that seems to be aimed at creating clutter in our souls. We are distracted by our phones, by advertisements, and the ceaseless assault of algorithms that are aimed at making a profit from the attention we give them. Screens, and the content they offer, leave us addicted as show after show adds density to the chains that keep our time and focus hostage.

And it's not just screens and content that are a problem. The way we have organized our lives as a culture has ushered us into what seems like a constant state of exhaustion, busyness, and hurry. Our lives feel like machines that never turn off and any rest, enjoyment, or peace we experience along the way never truly restores us, rather it just fuels the unsustainable pace of our existence.

By the time we try to befriend silence for the sake of cultivating intimacy with Jesus, we are in a shattered state. Our exhaustion and emotional numbness keep us from being fully present with God. Rather than the spiritual discipline of silence serving our intentions to grow in fellowship with Jesus, we experience it as a burden. Rather than a means of entering into delight, silence feels more like a duty.

The words of Psalm 62:1 and Psalm 46:10, among many other verses of Scripture, inform us that silence before God is a form of prayer. The spiritual discipline of silence is one of the most powerful gifts God has given us because of the way that it deepens our encounters with God by creating space to behold the Lord's glory and orient our hearts to listen to God's voice.

Naming the barriers we face when befriendng silence is an important step in actually engaging in this spiritual discipline. Similarly to turning off the television, our phones, or any other screens to experience physical silence in a room, spiritually speaking we have to identify where the noise is coming from in our souls to lower the volume within.

On day one of this 10-day journey, let's begin by approaching God in silence with the mindset of a small child who is learning to walk. Our goal for today is to take baby steps, knowing that walking and running takes time.

In addition to starting out small, I would also suggest setting aside a few moments of prayer throughout the day, rather than just one time of prayer alone. Attempting to engage in prayerful silence multiple times will not only help you to grow in this discipline, but it will give you a taste of what it is like to frame your entire day with intimacy with God woven throughout (an ancient practice that has shaped God's people over the centuries).

One way of approaching this would be to set apart a few minutes in the morning for silence, a few minutes during the middle of the day, and a few minutes in the evening before you go to bed. Keep in mind that our aim is to build disciplines and habits versus just seeing one-off moments of prayer.

For this first day of prayer, let's focus our befriendng of silence not so much on mastering this discipline, but on identifying the sources of distraction and noise in our souls.

As you pray, what are you noticing about what is distracting you? To what does your mind drift towards? As you engage in prayerful silence throughout the day, take time to jot down these things. In addition to taking note of them, offer them to God. I suggest using this prayer:

“Heavenly Father, I offer the things that distract my heart and create noise in my soul. I lay them down at your feet as I seek to simply enjoy your presence in worshipful silence through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray.”

MORNING SILENCE

Use the space below to take note of what is coming in your soul as you engage in silence. Write down your prayers, and what stirs in your soul, and take note of your experience of God's presence and how he is at work in your heart.

AFTERNOON SILENCE

Use the space below to take note of what is coming in your soul as you engage in silence. Write down your prayers, and

what stirs in your soul, and take note of your experience of God's presence and how he is at work in your heart.

EVENING SILENCE

Use the space below to take note of what is coming in your soul as you engage in silence. Write down your prayers, what stirs in your soul, and take note of your experience of God's presence and how he is at work in your heart.

DAY TWO: RETURNING TO THE WELL

John 6:66 "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

October 2012 will stand out in my mind for the rest of my life because of the impact of Hurricane Sandy. Experts measured this storm and determined that it was the size of Europe! The destruction it wreaked was quite severe throughout the coastal areas of NYC, but especially beach communities like the Rockaways where my family and I lived. The days and weeks following the storm were awful as debris and destruction piled high in front of every home, and on every street — with some piles reaching as high as 14 feet.

If these days weren't hard enough to contend with, on top of all that NYC experienced a petroleum gas shortage. Thankfully it didn't go on for long, but considering all the pressures and challenges folks were facing already, hunting for gas, waiting long periods of time just to get to the pump, and discovering that there was no more gas was the last thing people needed.

I was one of those New Yorkers who had no choice other than hunt for gas, endure the long waits and hope for the best. I lived in the Rockaways in Queens, but I pastored in Brooklyn so driving was a non-negotiable reality for my life. The trains

and buses in my area are few and wouldn't take the most direct routes to Brooklyn or Manhattan, all the more reason why driving was necessary. For these reasons and others, I had no choice but to endure the inconvenience of it all and do whatever was needed to fill up the tank of my car.

Of all those days, one day is etched in my mind because of the spiritual principle it reinforced.

It was an early morning in Brooklyn and I was driving on Fourth Avenue towards the Park Slope neighborhood. The numerical streets were running in descending order as I drove down towards a gas station that was reported to have a full load of gas. During those days people were posting on social media and other websites wherever they found a gas station that was open and ready for cars to fill up. By the time I arrived the line was already several streets long. Everyone understood what needed to be done. Form even lines and continue to inch forward towards an empty gas pump as folks who filled up their cars with gas would drive away happy from the pump, making way for the next car.

Everything was looking good, but then suddenly the station manager stood in front of an empty pump and started waving their hands so that everyone would notice him. He raised his voice and began to shout "We are out of gas! No more gas!". All of a sudden this peaceful morning gave way to the stress that was brewing beneath the surface of all those drivers. Many began to honk their horns out of frustration. A few let out some choice words at the manager (poor guy...he didn't deserve that! He was just doing his job...) and many just looked numb. What happened next is what delivered the insight I want to share with you.

Almost immediately people began to look at their phones. We were all doing the same thing, at the same time. We were looking to see if there was any gas station nearby that was reported as having gas. All of a sudden a bunch of distinct cars all began to drive at the same time and in the same direction and I was one of them. We must have all read the same message that told us another gas station along Fourth Avenue had gas.

I wish I could have been in a helicopter that day to see the aerial view of all these cars driving at the same time, heading in the same direction and then pulling up to the same gas station. It must have looked wild! Sadly, we pulled up to that gas station only to be told that they just ran out of gas. The empty pumps that looked so promising just moments before now were the bearers of bad news. Though we just experienced the same thing twice, this time there were no angry outbursts or horns blaring. Everyone just went straight to their phones in the hopes of finding another gas station and just like that we were off to the races again, but this time it would end in triumph! At least for the cars that were part of this mad dash with me and for some short time after, people were able to fill up their cars and live to drive another day.

As I reflected on this moment it occurred to me that people in those cars embraced a reality that many followers of Jesus can be slow to embrace, namely that you can't run on an empty tank. It was never a question for those drivers if they were going to hunt down gas till they found it. Was it inconvenient? Yes! Was it frustrating? Yes! Was it easy? NO! Regardless of the challenges that were faced, everyone remained focused and intent on finding gas, no matter what it entailed.

Spiritually speaking, we were not created to run on an empty tank. The fuel that fills us up and empowers us to follow Christ is actually the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, studying Scripture and various other spiritual disciplines we can experience a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. God has designed the Christian life to function best through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God, but also through his infilling. He fills our spirits and hearts with his very being, thus empowering us to live as Jesus lived.

Try as we may, we will not be able to follow Christ without the Holy Spirit's presence filling our hearts. This is a non-negotiable reality of the Christian life, so like the drivers on that morning, we don't have the option to settle for an empty tank if we intend to follow Jesus. Regardless of the hurdles that may come our way we have to resolve in ourselves that we will live filled with the Holy Spirit. Cultivating a consistent life of prayer, regularly studying Scripture, and engaging in other spiritual disciplines is hard work. It requires great sacrifice. It's okay to admit that it's not easy and that at times we may not have the desire to follow through. Though all of that can be true, in the end, none of those reasons change the fact that if we don't allow the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with Himself, then we will become empty and stuck in our walk with Jesus.

Unlike those drivers that morning, sadly we as Christians give up in response to the challenges and setbacks we face on the road to deepening our intimacy with Jesus, especially when it comes to the Spiritual Discipline of Silence.

Yesterday we named the reality that befriending silence is hard work. I would imagine that as you prayed yesterday and engaged in silence that for many of us the results may have

been lackluster or even downright discouraging. You might have said to yourself something like “Did I even pray?”, “I was so distracted!”, or “I’m not a fan of that kind of praying”. If you struggled yesterday, the temptation is likely to be strong to give up and not try that again. The temptation to give up and settle for a devotional life that doesn’t benefit from the discipline of silence or even worse, you might entertain giving up on the idea of living a life filled with the presence of God.

When facing these challenges, what choice do we have? It’s a very simple choice...keep returning to the well! We can’t afford to live spiritually thirsty, empty lives. Trying to follow Jesus on an empty tank will never work. Thankfully we know where to run to drink deeply from the rivers of living water. We will not find living water anywhere else, so even though befriending silence for the sake of being with Jesus can be challenging, we actually have no choice but to face those challenges as people determined to live filled with the presence of God.

Similar to yesterday, I want to encourage you to plan on engaging in silent prayer three times (morning, afternoon, and evening). During those three times of silent prayer I want to encourage you to pray slightly differently each time.

MORNING SILENCE

With the words of John 6:68-69 before you, turn your heart to God in silence as you meditate on the words of these verses:

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Let your heart absorb the majesty of the presence of God as you silently meditate on the truth that:

- Only the Jesus has the words of eternal life

Write down your prayer and reflections below

AFTERNOON SILENCE

As you engage in silence again, respond to the words of John 6:68-69 by forming a silent prayer that asks Jesus to speak to you. In acknowledgment that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life, ask the Lord to speak to your heart. Whether you are praying about something in your life that requires a word from God or just simply seeking the Lord’s heart for you, as you encounter the Lord in silent prayer ask him to speak to your heart and remain in a posture of silence as you still your heart to listen to his voice.

It’s likely been a few hours since you last prayed and chances are the Lord has been trying to speak to you multiple times and in multiple ways. Whether through remembering a passage of Scripture that came to mind, a sense of the Holy

Spirit's conviction on you engaged with your work or in conversation with others, or many other ways, take note of how God may have been trying to speak to you.

But what if God wasn't trying to speak to you? That's okay too. Perhaps you could use this time to pray and ask the Lord to help you not miss his voice as you move forward in your day.

As you take time to pray in silence, pay attention to how the Holy Spirit meets you and take notes below. Write down anything that came up for you during this time.

EVENING SILENCE

The other truth that John 6:68-69 presents to us is that:
- Jesus is the Holy One (he holds that title alone)

That's a stunningly brilliant truth! As you take the time to engage in prayerful silence again, put this powerful truth before your heart. Jesus is the Holy One!

Allow this truth to cause your heart to respond in wonder, awe and reverence. Make room to experience a sense of conviction as your sin comes to the surface in the presence of our Holy God.

As you engage in silent prayer, allow the holiness of Jesus to permeate your soul. Ask him to change your heart and cause you to love the things he loves and hate the things he hates.

However you find yourself encountering the presence of Jesus, take note of it below.

DAY THREE: THE GIFT OF SILENCE

Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

As we have engaged in the spiritual discipline of silence God has been subtly teaching us the Good News of Jesus. Though attempting to learn about the Gospel was not our goal, silence is a master teacher nonetheless.

Ephesians 2:8 makes the sweeping, life-altering declaration that salvation is accomplished by grace through faith, while not resting on our human efforts. All of our attempts to save ourselves are rendered useless as God tells us that his salvation is offered to us based on grace. What is grace? Glad you asked! Grace is an unearned, underserved favor. It means that God treats us and relates to us not based on what we rightly deserve, rather he treats us better than we deserve.

Despite God making this abundantly clear, we still try to earn God’s favor and love, even though it was declared to be ours already. The Bible calls this “works”. Works can take place in the shape of prayer, reading Scripture, or any number of good, meaningful, and Biblical things that we should do. The problem is that when we are engaged in works, we aren’t doing these good things from a place of gratitude in our hearts, rather we are doing them to try to earn God’s blessings and love. Works

try to prove the false point that God isn’t extending any kind of grace to us when he loves us because our works say that we deserve the blessings of God’s favor because we earned them.

Engaging in silence becomes a master teacher of the Gospel to us because through silence we are reminded that we actually don’t bring anything that justifies us in the sight of God. There is nothing we can say to make God love us more than the love with which he already loves us. Religious words and flowering statements won’t make us spiritual enough to qualify us to deserve God’s grace. There is, in fact, nothing we could do or say to earn or deserve our salvation, meaning that try as we may to work for it, we will never be able to earn it because it can’t be bought. It’s been said that salvation is not achieved, it is received and the discipline of silence affirms that.

As you engage in your third day of befriending silence in order to cultivate intimacy with Jesus, this day we are going to allow silence to overtly reinforce the truth of the Gospel in our souls.

With Ephesians 2:8-9 before you, prayerfully meditate on the truths that:

- We are saved by grace through faith
- We are not saved by our own doing
- We are not saved by works, therefore we could never boast in our own goodness

Similarly to the last two days, I want to encourage you to frame your day in prayer as you stop to engage in silence before God in the morning, afternoon and evening.

MORNING SILENCE

As you engage in prayerful silence this morning, allow the truths from Ephesians 2:8-9 to recenter you on the truth of the Gospel. What comes up in your soul as you prayerfully meditate on these truths? Take some time to write those things down or even write down the prayer that takes shape in your heart during this time of silence.

AFTERNOON SILENCE

During this midday moment of prayerful silence, now is a perfect moment to reflect on our tendency to try and work to earn our standing before God. Works show up in all of our lives in some way, shape or form. How does it show up for you? As you approach God in prayerful silence ask God to reveal to you the ways you are trying to deserve and earn God's love. As the Lord makes you aware, take the time to lay down your works. If convicted of the sin of works, take the time to confess that sin before God. Though we are engaged in silence, if confession is prompted by the Holy Spirit, take the time to confess and return to silence once you have confessed.

As you close this time of silence, return once again to the truths of Ephesians 2:8 where it says you have been saved by grace through faith. In your silent prayer thank God for his grace.

Take a moment to jot down below how the Lord met you during this time of silent prayer.

EVENING SILENCE

Considering the fullness of how God met us during our times of silent prayer, let's close our last moment of silence in gratitude for the Good News of Jesus. Let your fill up with gratitude for the grace of God that has rescued and saved you. As you lay down the exhausting tendency to try and earn our salvation through works, let your heart experience grateful praise to fill your soul.

However gratitude is occupying your heart, take a moment to offer that gratitude to God during this time of prayerful silence.

After engaging in prayerful silence, I invite you to end this time by prayerfully declaring out loud the words of Ephesians 2:8-10 as the last word of your prayer.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

In the space provided below, take a moment to write down how God met you during this time of silent prayer.

DAY FOUR: GOD IS OUR FATHER

Matthew 6:5 *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven,...”*

One of the greatest spiritual struggles we face in this life is the struggle to see God as he truly is rather than seeing him as we wish him to be. It’s not that we arbitrarily wish God to be a certain way, rather our broken experiences in life have a way of creating a distorted lens through which we come to see God. Perhaps the greatest distortion of our vision of God is the way we resist seeing God as a loving, tender, approachable father, yet this is the way Jesus teaches us to address God.

If you are like me, perhaps you have had a broken experience relating to your earthly father. In my case, my father rejected me in the womb as he forcibly took my mother to an abortion clinic three times. Each time she lied that she went through with it and as soon as he realized she had lied to him he would beat her to try and force a miscarriage. Way before I pulled these details out of my mother through my persistence (a skill I

carry with me to this day), it's remarkable to me how even now I remember carrying a profound sense of rejection in my soul. I always felt unwanted, unlovable, and out of place in the deep recesses of my soul. Even when people treated me kindly and welcomed me in, I never fully felt accepted. Over time, the concept of a father developed in me as someone who would reject and discard me, so imagine the difficulty I faced in learning to see God as the loving father that he is.

Even if your experience doesn't resemble mine at all, I would bet that in some other way, you struggle to see God as the loving father that he truly is. Perhaps this shows up in the way you seek approval from others. Perhaps it's the way you struggle with fear and anxiety. Maybe it's the way you are prone to being a workaholic or the ways you self-medicate through entertainment and pleasure. In each of these scenarios, ask yourself "How could seeing God as Father change how I experience my struggles in life?"

When it comes to consecration, why is it important that we grow in our capacity to see God as a loving father? Our many struggles and sins that cause us to drift from God are fueled by an inaccurate view of God. When we see God as he is, we don't run from him, rather we run towards him. Seeing God as Father lets us know that the affirmation, comfort, direction, and security we seek through sin are sadly misdirected. We can only find what we are looking for in God alone.

Take a few moments right now and begin to pray with nothing more on your heart and on your lips than seeing and calling God your Father. As you call God your Father, what are some false views of God that you will need to abandon? Take time to confess those false views of God. Ask God to erase the

imprint of those views from your heart, while also asking him to imprint the true image of who he is on the tablets of your soul. What are some sins and struggles that you are recognizing are fueled by and sustained by a false view of God? Write down what the Lord is bringing to the surface.

In the place of confession and repentance recognize that you are being met by your loving Heavenly Father. Receive his loving embrace as you sit in his presence. If you could capture in words the experience of receiving his love right now, what words would you use? Take time to write down what is taking place in your heart.

DAY FIVE: HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

*Matthew 6:9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name"*

If referring to God as Father wasn't revolutionary enough, Jesus also teaches us to address God as holy. When you put the idea that God is a loving father together with the truth that he is also holy it could easily feel like we are connecting two opposing ideas. In God, these truths exist in beautiful harmony.

Seeing God as Father disarms the religious walls that we tend to build up for ourselves. A religious view of God sees him as unapproachable, aloof, and uncaring. During Jesus' time and for the audience that Jesus was addressing, teaching people to address God as father was quite scandalous. At various moments in the Gospels, we can feel the disdain of the religious leaders towards Jesus because of the intimate, approachable familiarity he addressed God the Father with. Seeing God the way Jesus teaches us can revolutionize our relationship with him. We are invited to draw close to God with a sense of expectant tenderness. God loves us, he desires us, and he calls us into his arms. That's what calling God our father has in store for us.

Addressing God as holy, however, has a different impact on our hearts. Rather than inviting us to see God as approachable, tender, and loving, seeing God as holy

draws us to see God as completely separate, higher, and altogether "other" than us. He is altogether unlike us and we are altogether unlike him. For God, holiness is not something he does, a behavior he embodies or ethics he aspires to us. When we address God as holy we are addressing the very essence of his being and in so doing we are reminded that this same loving, welcoming father also has a profound hatred for sin. God doesn't tolerate sin. He doesn't justify it away, nor does he lower his standards or change his mind on what he calls out as sinful. Pride will never be seen as humility in his eyes or hatred ever be seen as love by him. There will never be a day in the future when God will change his mind with respect to murder, lust, the abuse of power, greed, gossip, bigotry or any form of clearly identified sin.

As grim as this may sound, it's actually incredibly hopeful for us in light of how we are broken by sin. If God is holy and we are not, then that means that growing in relationship with God will require ongoing honesty about who we truly are in light of who he truly is. We never have to pretend, hide or excuse away our sins to God. Our holy Father is utterly clear on both who he is as a holy God and who we are as unholy people. Though the holiness of God is good news for us, losing sight of his holiness is not! Whenever we lose sight of how holy God is we inevitably lose sight of how unholy we are. Rather than see ourselves in light of the raw reality of our brokenness, people who lose focus on just how holy God is will develop a distorted, romanticized view of ourselves. When we don't see God as holy self-deception and a disfigured sense of self-identity grows rampant within us.

As you take time to pray today, lead your heart to not only address God as Father, but intentionally address God as holy.

DAY SIX: YOUR KINGDOM COME

*Matthew 6:9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**"*

In addition to teaching us to address God as both father and as holy, he teaches us to pray that God's kingdom would come, for his will to be done, and for life on earth to be transformed by both the kingdom of God and the will of God.

As potent as the language of the "kingdom" coming, God's will being done, and the imagery of earth looking more like heaven is, it's interesting how Jesus tethers these powerful things to us asking God for them. Jesus orients our hearts with a truly humbling truth here, namely: God chooses to connect his kingdom coming, his will being done and the earth being transformed to our prayers. Think about that for a moment!

Though God doesn't need us for his kingdom to come or his will to be done, he chooses to work through our prayers. These words establish a powerful relational dynamic between God acting in our world and us praying for him to act.

We are also confronted here with God's kingdom and will stand in direct opposition to the kingdoms and will of men. As followers of Jesus we have to be honest about the fact that though we call Jesus our king, we are not always seeking Jesus to rule in our lives. In place of his kingdom and his will

we build our own kingdom and seek our own will even as we continue to rightly identify Jesus as the true king. What are areas in your life where disobedience festers in defiance to God's word? What are the things you pursue at all costs and refuse to live without, even to the point of putting aside God's will for your life? The answers to those questions will help you locate your personal kingdom. As you ask God's kingdom to come in your life, be prepared to lay down your personal kingdom for his.

Where do you see God's will being done? Where do you see his kingdom coming? Where do you see the earth looking more like heaven? Jesus tells us here that when we see these things take root before our eyes rest assured that someone, somewhere prayed for these things. These could be prayers that were offered decades ago or prayers offered in some faraway country from us, but regardless of the time or place, prayer precedes God's kingdom activity in our world.

If God's job is to bring his kingdom to bear on our earthly reality and our job is to pray that he would do so, then the question we have to wrestle with is: "Do my prayers reflect my participation in God's will being done on earth?"

In response to racism, poverty, injustice, crime, poor performing schools, divisions, sex trafficking, vulnerable children, exploited workers, and many other things that resist God's design for our lives, is our response to pray or do we complain? Are we blaming others for the wrongs in our world or are we interceding in prayer for God to make our world more like heaven?

When our relationships fray, do we respond with bitterness and anger or do we recognize this as an instance where God's will and kingdom are sorely needed to change the situation?

After praying, God will often lead us to participate with him in building his kingdom on earth and seeing his will be done. Bold action tends to follow these kinds of prayers, but if we are never led to specific action, we will always be called to pray as our first and foremost duty.

Where do you see God's kingdom and his will being done on earth? Where do you see glimpses of the kingdom of God transforming our earthly realities? Take a moment to make some notes.

Prayerfully imagine if God's kingdom came to the borough of Queens and the entirety of NYC. What would that look like? How would things be different? Capture what that looks like below and take a few moments to pray for God to make this vision a reality.

Where do you see human pride dominate, power being abused, human and physical resources being misused and corruption running rampant? Those are places where we need God's kingdom to come and his will to be done. Write down places, relationships, and situations where you identify the need for God's kingdom to come.

DAY SEVEN: OUR DAILY BREAD

*Matthew 6:9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. **Give us this day our daily bread,***

When Jesus teaches us to pray for God to provide our daily bread, this isn't just limited to asking for food. Rather, it is inclusive of the full range of human needs. Bread has long been a staple in the diets of the poor as it provides affordable sustenance. As we ask for bread Jesus permits us to ask for the things we need for our sustenance and even survival.

Bread not only carried these meanings, but it also symbolized the Word of God and its capacity to nourish and sustain the human soul. What physical bread is to our bodies, the word of God is to our spirits, and here Jesus is teaching us to ask God's word to sustain us.

Jesus doesn't just tell us to ask for bread, for sustenance and nourishment in general, but he specifically says that we should ask for **daily bread**.

In the book of Exodus, chapter 16, we find God providing manna (a form of bread) for Israel as they wandered towards the Promised Land. On a daily basis, God would provide manna, and he gave instructions that it was not to be stored for future use. They were to eat the manna on the same day it was provided and wait for God to provide manna the next day. Pretty wild!

As Jesus teaches us to ask for daily bread, this harkens back to this moment in Exodus. From the time of Israel wandering the desert up until the present and beyond, God has sought to establish the dynamics of our relationship with him. Our relationship with God has always been and will forever be marked by a form of creaturely dependence. Though God loves us, has created us in his image, and has bestowed with us inherent dignity and worth, we will always relate to God from a place of need. We are not the ones bringing something to the relationship that God needs, but he is always bringing something to our relationship with him that meets our deep needs. Asking God not just for bread, but for daily bread continuously recenters us in this posture of creaturely dependence.

The comfort and confidence we have to ask God for our base needs to be met reveals the degree to which we trust that God will provide for us. When we ask God to feed us his word so that our spirits would be sustained and nourished we should ask with the assurance that God wants to feed us his word far greater than we could ever desire it for ourselves. In other words, Jesus isn't telling us to beg for bread, rather he is teaching us to daily exercise our confidence that our loving, heavenly father will provide bread when we need it.

Why would Jesus tell us to ask for daily bread if we couldn't be confident that God the Father would provide it? In turn, why would we ask God to provide for our needs if we didn't believe that he cared enough to listen to our requests, no matter how big or small they may be?

Though at first glance it may not be apparent how asking God to meet our daily needs plays any part in our journey of

consecration, a closer look reveals some important things to process. Whenever we seek to meet our needs outside of God's prescribed boundaries, sin is present. It's not sinful to have needs or to seek for those needs to be fulfilled, but whenever we seek to fulfill those needs in ways that God has not sanctioned we find ourselves outside of God's will for our lives.

As followers of Jesus, our daily journey of transformation is one that involves learning to fulfill our needs in God first and only through the means that God has designed for our flourishing. So, if we are used to meeting our human need for intimacy through the broken counterfeit that is pornography, discipleship will involve learning to meet our need for intimacy through God-ordained means. If we are dependent on our jobs to provide us with a sense of fulfillment, identity, and safety, then discipleship will entail learning to find these things in God and in Christian community.

Whenever we ask God for daily bread it's an opportunity for God to retrain our hearts to fulfill our needs in Christ and through the means that Christ has created and blessed to meet those needs. Like someone who is undergoing the journey of recovery from substance abuse and has to relearn how to celebrate life without depending on substances or deal with grief without numbing themselves with drugs, spiritually speaking we need to recover from the addictive pathway of fulfilling our needs outside of Christ. It turns out that whenever God provides our daily bread he is not just meeting our tangible and spiritual needs, he is freeing our hearts again and again from the chains that seek to bind us.

Take a moment and make a list of your most pressing physical and spiritual needs and as you write them down turn them into a prayer, asking God to provide your daily bread.

What are the legitimate needs in your life that you are seeking fulfillment for through means that God has not prescribed? As you take a moment to jot this down, allow your heart to turn towards God in confession and repentance. Allow God to forgive you and cleanse you as you ask him to help you fulfill those needs in him and through the means he has designed for us.

DAY EIGHT: FORGIVE US OUR SINS, AS WE FORGIVE OTHERS

*Matthew 6:9 "Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, **12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**"*

God's invitation for us to confess our sins and his empowerment to forgive the sins others commit against us are arguably two of the greatest gifts he has ever given us.

To ask God to forgive our sins requires a profound sense of confidence in the Good News of Jesus Christ. We have to believe God's promise to forgive us in order to confess our sin, and the faith to believe that God will be gracious towards us is derived as we gaze upon the cross of his Son. The God who delivered his Son for our redemption is the same God that Jesus teaches us to address as Father and is the same God we trust to forgive our sins.

We will never confess the sins that we can't be honest about, but unless we learn to see God as the loving Father that he truly is, our only alternative will be to hide and deny our sins. The love of God that awaits us in moments of confession uniquely empowers us to be ruthlessly honest about our sin. The time to run and hide has thankfully come to an end because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross!

Jesus teaches us to not only confess our own sins before God but to also forgive those who have sinned against us. Unconfessed and unrepentant sin not only hinders our relationship with God, but it's at the heart of why our human relationships break down. Wherever we see relationships break apart, if you search long enough you will always find some form of unconfessed and unforgiven sin that was committed against us.

The cross of Christ was intended to not only heal our relationship with the Father, it was also meant to heal our relationships with each other. To confess our sins to God for forgiveness for the sins we have committed against him yet refuse to forgive others for the sins they have committed against us is one of the greatest affronts to the cross of Christ. If you want to know the extent to which you have allowed God to transform your heart, look no further than the moments we choose to forgive those who have sinned against us. Forgiving others because God in Christ has forgiven us provides us with a litmus test that reveals our spiritual maturity. In the end, all the Bible verses we have memorized and the songs we sing don't amount to much if we aren't walking in forgiveness toward others, especially those who have wronged us.

With respect to consecrating ourselves to the Lord, few prayers are as vital as confessing our sins to God and praying as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Sin is always in the driver's seat whenever we find ourselves drifting from our relationship with God and whenever our earthly relationships experience fractures. It's only through confessing our sins to God, receiving his forgiveness, and extending his forgiveness to others that we can experience the relational healing the cross of Christ provides for us.

Prepare to sit in silent contemplation before God in a moment. As you do so, pay attention to what the Holy Spirit brings to your mind with regard to unconfessed sin. It could be sins that are impacting your relationship with God or it could be sins that are impacting your relationships with others. Keep in mind that what the Holy Spirit brings to your attention is for the purpose of leading you to confession, not to heap any kind of shame on you. Thanks be to God! As you write those things below, spend a few moments praying through what the Lord is putting on your heart.

As you confess your sin to God and pray forgiveness over others, it is vital that you grab hold of God's assurances to forgive us and cleanse us. Open your Bible to 1 John 1 and focus on verses 7-10. What stands out to you with respect to how God is meeting you with grace and mercy in his heart towards you?

DAY NINE: LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

Matthew 6:9 "Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors 13 And lead us not into temptation..."

Temptation is the experience of being enticed away from God while moving towards sin. Though temptation and sin are closely associated, they are in fact separate things. It might surprise you to realize that Jesus was tempted by sin! Though the writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus never sinned (chapter 4, verse 15), it also tells us that he was fully tempted, just like we are.

Praying about temptations is a discipline we need to grow in. Learning to pray about the things that entice and allure us brings so much of God's light into the dark places of shame and hiddenness in our souls. Temptations grow into a full-blown sin the same way mushrooms grow...in the dark. Making our temptations a matter of prayer is a growing sign of maturity because it reveals that we are growing in appropriate comfortability with God. We don't choose the particular things that tempt us. Though we can often trace the origin of certain recurring temptations in our lives, identifying at a finite level why these things particularly tempt us isn't always clear. What is clear is how shame-inducing it can be to admit to ourselves that we are tempted, let alone share this with someone else.

Talking to God about our temptations is a pretty significant milestone in our relationship with him. It's a choice to refuse to be hidden from God. It's a choice to trust him with the parts of our lives that aren't always easy to admit to, let alone seek help for.

If you are like me, you probably do most of your praying after you sin, rather than praying about your temptations before they begin to stir in your soul. Don't get me wrong: we should pray after we sin. During yesterday's prayer time, we confessed our sins, and that is exactly what Jesus wanted us to do. But what if we spent just as much time praying about our temptations before we sinned? What if we grew to consistently choose to live in the light towards God rather than letting darkness build around our hearts? This is what awaits us as we grow in our posture of praying about our temptations and not just confessing our sins.

As I continue to grow in this kind of prayer, I can honestly say that I have experienced a sigh of relief as the lies that fuel my temptations come to wither in the light of God's love. Many times I have found the grace to turn away from the things that tempted me as I honestly prayed about my temptations. As a pastor, I want nothing more than that for every follower of Jesus. I want this for you! At other times, the honest truth is that I would make my temptations a matter of prayer and shortly after would find myself giving in to those very temptations. When I first started to intentionally and proactively pray about my temptations, this was pretty discouraging. "Wasn't this supposed to help me combat sin better?" I thought to myself. I want to spare you some of that heartache by saying that Jesus doesn't promise that praying about your temptations is the silver bullet that will defeat your struggles and always lead you to victory. Growing in Christ

is far more complicated than that. Here is the good news: whether praying about your temptations leads to sinning less or not, praying about your temptations will always strengthen your intimacy with God.

What are the things that tempt you? Identify the things that entice and lure you away from God. As you write these things down, allow the honesty and truthfulness to sink in for a moment. God is not meeting you with shame and judgment right now; your heavenly Father is looking at you with pure love in his heart. He's known this whole time and has been faithful to love you regardless. None of what you are owning and admitting to right now comes as a shock to God. The God who fully knows us, fully loves us. That truth is what steadily grows in us each time we confess our temptations to God and learn to embrace his nearness even in the midst of sin knocking at the door of our hearts.

Once you write down your temptations and own them before God, take a moment to write down a personal prayer to God about your temptations. It doesn't have to be long, complicated, or deep. You can just simply say, "These are my temptations God. Help me to be honest about them with you..." or something in that vein. However your prayer takes shape,

take a moment now to stamp this time with a specific prayer about your specific temptations.

Before we end this time, I want to leave you with a visual that I hope warms your heart, even though it might gross you out a bit. As a father of four kids, I'm no stranger to kids being sick. I've lost count at this point of how many doctor visits, belly aches, and fevers we have had to deal with. One moment in particular stands out in my mind. During a car ride to Pennsylvania, one of my kids threw up all over the car. It was pretty awful! At that particular instance, my first reaction wasn't overly paternal. I was grossed out and disgusted and rightly so. As my kid was covered in vomit, I remember they began to whimper and at that moment all I could feel was love. The nastiness of what their clothes were covered in didn't matter. Picking them up and holding them would cause my clothes to get dirty, but that didn't matter either. All I cared about was making them feel loved and cared for despite how they felt at the moment. Can I tell you, God doesn't care about how ugly the things you just shared are! All he cares about is you! Before you end this time of prayer, take two minutes to simply sit in the loving embrace of the Father and allow him to hold you in the midst of all the junk you just brought into his presence.

DAY TEN: DELIVER US FROM EVIL

*Matthew 6:9 "Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors 13 And lead us not into temptation, **but deliver us from evil.**"*

Our world struggles with calling things evil. It doesn't sound nice or politically correct, yet Jesus teaches us that asking God to deliver us from evil is a much-needed prayer. Evil exists in our world and the Scriptures tell us of the "evil one" named Satan who John 10:10 says has come to "steal, kill, and destroy". Revelation 12:10 describes Satan as an "accuser" who day and night accused believers before God. The tendency to shame ourselves and beat ourselves up after we sin doesn't originate with us. It's a tactic of spiritual warfare the enemy of our souls has been using since the Garden of Eden. In John 8:44 Jesus refers to Satan as the "father of lies", which informs us that deceit, fabricating the truth, and denial of what is true are all influenced by him at some level. He is the source from which all untruths flow. 1 Peter 5:8 describes the enemy of our soul like a "roaring lion, seeking someone to devour". Evil is real, and it is bent on destroying you and me!

In the West, many Christians underemphasize the reality of Satan. I will admit that to the modern mind, it sounds a bit crazy to believe that evil exists in the form of a being called the Devil and that there is a spiritual realm to this life, etc, etc. If you have ever been around Christians that feel like they are

CLOSING WORD

At the start of our 10 days of consecration I would imagine that many of you felt a mixture of excitement and perhaps slight dread. This is hard stuff to do! Building habits of prayer is not for the faint of heart, let alone to do so in the context of returning to the Lord in any ways that we have drifted from him. However this week ended for you, I want to commend you for taking these powerful steps towards the Lord.

Though days of fasting and prayer can seem like an eternity from one perspective, it's such a small segment of time in the grand scheme of things. Perhaps you are ending these 10 days feeling spiritually charged and renewed like never before, and if that's the case I thank God with you for what he has done. But chances are some of you may feel more of a mix of hopefulness with some heaviness because, during this time, you may have discovered in a fresh way just how broken you really are. Wrestling down our hearts to pray has a way of showing us just how resistant we actually are to all that God has for us. It's in these moments that it makes perfect sense why Jesus described following him as a journey of picking up our own cross. Following Jesus is not for the faint of heart and it's a journey that doesn't always feel exhilarating.

So, whether you are feeling like you are on top of the world right now or you are feeling a bit challenged, the good news is that no one becomes a fully mature follower of Jesus in a few days. It doesn't work like that. Till our last breath on this earth, you and I will be pilgrims on the long path of growing in Christlikeness. Along the way, God grants us the ability to see true progress and we rejoice for that, but we never fully

arrive. There are always more ways we can grow in Christ, and my prayer is that this past week has strengthened you in a significant way for the journey ahead.

Because our confidence and joy don't rest on anything we can do, but only on what Christ has done on our behalf, there is cause for all of us to rejoice. We serve a God that allows us to come back home, even after we stray and for that, we should all be deeply grateful for the mercies of God.

With Love,

Pastor Kris

[1] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (Harper One, 2006).

